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FOR REFUGEES

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REFUGEES IN AFRICA:

A SUMMARY OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

While international attention is focused on the Persian Gulf region and a threatened exodus from Iraq and Kuwait, the situation of refugees in Africa remains a major concern for UNHCR. Continued conflicts and instability in a number of countries have created new refugee movements, while a marked and sustained increase in fuel prices as a result of events in the Gulf has had a major negative impact on the budgeting of UNHCR assistance programmes throughout the continent. This briefing note provides a summary of the current situation.

I. ETHIOPIA

a) Sudanese refugees

The Sudanese refugee population in Ethiopia currently stands at around 385,000. In response to early-warning indicators received from Sudan (continuing conflict, drought and famine), a contingency plan for a possible new influx of 50,000 Sudanese refugees has been prepared, and US dollars 1 million has been allocated from UNHCR's Emergency Fund, against an estimated total budget of US dollars 4.6 million for a period of three months. A first group of 200 Sudanese refugees had arrived in Itang, western Ethiopia, by mid-January. Five thousand tents originally foreseen for Sudan have been diverted to Ethiopia, and steps have been taken to reroute to Ethiopia a stock of medicines and medical equipment originally purchased for Somalia.

b) Somali refugees

More than 375,000 Somali refugees are now to be found in Ethiopia. The influx of refugees from north-west Somalia (mainly the Erigavo area) which started in December 1990 is now reported to exceed 20,000, all of whom are accommodated in Daror. Two airlifts have been organized from Addis Ababa to provide them with tents, plastic sheets and blankets. While emergency needs are at present adequately met, water - which is already in very short supply - will become an increasingly critical problem.

c) Ethiopian returnees

As of 25 January, more than 12,000 new arrivals from Somalia were registered at Dolo, Siftu and Moyale. This group consists of Ethiopian nationals who were previously living as refugees in Somalia, and who left their country of asylum in response to the conflict there. Reports from Addis Ababa indicate that these returnees require urgent and immediate assistance in terms of food, supplementary feeding, medical aid and immunization. Seven people have already died at Dolo due to hunger or malnutrition. According to a mission undertaken by UNHCR, more than 3,000 returnees have been registered in Kelafo and Mustahil, but as many as 50,000 returnees may have entered the Bale and Haraghe provinces of Ethiopia. Recent developments in Somalia could act as a 'push factor' to further repatriation.

II. DJIBOUTI

A mission undertaken on 18 January by the UNHCR Representative in Djibouti to Assamo and Ali Adde has revealed that some 1,000 Somali refugees have crossed into Djibouti. The government also reports that another group of some 3,000 people had reached Aisha in Ethiopia and were on their way to Djibouti.

III. KENYA

A joint assessment mission (Kenyan government and UN agencies) undertaken on 15-17 January to north/south-eastern Kenya along the Somali border found that some 5,000 Ethiopian refugees from Somalia have entered Kenya at Mandera, Liboi, Amoma and Olungu. Their immediate needs include food, transport, temporary shelter and medicines. Responding to this influx, an initial allocation of US dollars 200,000 has been made from UNHCR's Emergency Fund. UNHCR's programme in this area is supported by UNICEF and the World Food Programme.

There are also some 1,000 Somali refugees in Kenya, of whom 132 came to Nairobi by plane. The rest were evacuated to Mombasa by ships and Italian aircraft.

IV. SOMALIA

In view of the deteriorating security situation in Somalia, UNHCR and other UN personnel evacuated from the country in January. A meeting was held in New York earlier this week to review preparedness measures for a speedy resumption of UN activities in that country.

READEX FICHE

V. SUDAN

Economic and environmental problems, coupled with continued conflict between government and rebel forces, have produced extensive crop failures. Food prices have reached levels which are beyond the purchasing power of many of the estimated 700,000 Ethiopian refugees living in the country. Full food rations will be required for the 310,000 refugees living in settlements and reception centres. This implies a doubling of the volume of foodstuffs provided to refugees in 1990.

VI. MALAWI

In November 1990, the Mozambican refugee population in Malawi stood at nearly 910,000. Less than 400 refugees repatriated to Mozambique under UNHCR auspices last year, while some of the earlier returnees made their way to Malawi for a second time. A new influx of Mozambicans in late 1990 led to overcrowding in a number of camps, thus increasing the potential for outbreaks of disease. The situation has been aggravated by increased transport costs and logistical problems, leading to delays in the delivery of food. UNHCR is reassessing its programme in Malawi in order to respond to these problems. Current peace talks between the Mozambican government and Renamo could improve the prospects for the organized return of the refugee population in Malawi and other neighbouring countries.

VII. LIBERIAN REFUGEES

Since the beginning of the civil war which started on the last day of 1989, more than 750,000 Liberians - 32 per cent of the population - have sought asylum in the neighbouring countries of Guinea (325,000), Cote d'Ivoire (300,000) and Sierra Leone (125,000). The governments and host communities concerned have provided them with a generous welcome, but the influx has had a very damaging impact on local economic and social structures. The conclusion of a ceasefire agreement in Bamako at the end of November, coupled with the distribution of foodstuffs within the country by UN and other agencies, has led to a reduction in the pace of the exodus.

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